



Inclusive Mainstream Fund: Best Practice for Schools

(DfE, June 2026)

Purpose

The Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) supports mainstream schools in England to become “inclusive by design”, ensuring all pupils, especially those with SEND, receive:

- High-quality adaptive teaching
- Early support when needs arise
- Fewer barriers to learning

Schools must:

- Understand their cohort's needs
- Plan whole-school inclusive approaches
- Use funding strategically for both universal and targeted support

1. The Universal Offer (for all pupils)

At the heart of IMF is a strong universal offer based on high-quality teaching and inclusive systems.

7 Principles of Inclusion

Schools should embed:

1. Ambitious leadership & governance
2. Evidence-based early support
3. High-quality, inclusive teaching
4. Enrichment beyond the classroom
5. Safe, respectful culture
6. Partnerships with families/services
7. Accessible, inclusive environments

These benefit *all pupils*, not just those with SEND.

Accountability

- Schools must publish an Inclusion Strategy (from Dec 2026)
- Must show how IMF funding improves inclusion and removes barriers



2. Examples of Best Practice

Leadership

- Use data to understand need
- Collaborate with other schools/services
- Benchmark and review policies for inclusion

Early Support

- Small group / 1:1 interventions
- Pre-teaching (e.g. vocabulary)
- Effective deployment of TAs

Teaching

- Focus on adaptive teaching
- Staff training and CPD
- Curriculum tailored to different needs

Enrichment

- Inclusive clubs, trips, activities
- Removing barriers to participation

Culture & Wellbeing

- Behaviour systems that support SEND
- Belonging and attendance focus
- Quiet/safe spaces

Partnerships

- Work closely with parents/carers
- Information sessions and forums
- Use of external specialists

Environment

- Sensory-friendly classrooms
- Visual supports
- Accessible spaces and transitions



3. Targeted Provision

For pupils whose needs go beyond the universal offer:

Examples of funded support:

- Small-group interventions (e.g. language support)
- Specialist training for staff
- Programmes like:
 - NELI (speech & language)
 - ELSEC
- Inclusion bases and specialist input
- Monitoring impact and progress

4. What Good Practice Looks Like (Case Studies)

Tanfield School

- Strong transition support (Year 4–7)
- Close work with primary schools
- Early interventions and pastoral support

Mount Pleasant Primary

- Visual timetables, adaptive teaching
- Personalised learning for SEND
- Strong focus on life skills and independence

Winyates Primary

- Graduated approach (assess–plan–do–review)
- Early identification of needs
- Above national outcomes

Shotton Hall Academy

- High-quality teaching + adaptive technology
- Subject-expert-led targeted support
- Strong academic progress and Ofsted outcomes

Key Takeaways

- Inclusion must be whole-school, not bolt-on
- Quality-first teaching is the biggest driver of outcomes
- Early intervention reduces long-term gaps
- Funding should balance:
 - Universal systems (for all)
 - Targeted support (for some)